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A LETTER TO A FRIEND,

SUGGESTED BY READING

"A Few Plain Words, on some points connected with the subject of Synodical Action."

QUEBEC, 9th January, 1854.

MY DEAR ——,

The subject which occupies the minds of so many among us at this time is one of vast importance, and, if it shall please God to bless the deliberations upon it, of happy promise, to the interests of the Church of England in this Province. There can be but one opinion among all reasonable men, who are at all acquainted with it, as to the necessity of seeking some remedy for the existing state of things. It is plain that unless it is desirable, for their own sakes as well as for the general interest, to leave upon our Bishops alone the whole responsibility of originating as well as of carrying out every measure which is necessary for the stability and advancement of the Church, both their power and their responsibility must be shared by the Clergy and by the Laity, each in their proper sphere and degree. The Bishops of the Church of England in the Colonies are in a position which no other Bishops in any time or place ever were: a position which is unfair both to themselves and to their flocks. If they attempt to exercise the power committed to them, when that exercise is plainly called for, they are in some quarters denounced as tyrants; if they are restrained from doing so, in any case, by the consciousness of standing in an undefined position, they are apt to be regarded as fearful or faithless. The Bishops then have a right to demand that they shall be relieved from these difficulties. They desire to avail themselves, so far as they lawfully may, of the counsel and co-operation of both Clergy and Laity in the administration of Ecclesiastical affairs; and the Clergy and

Laity have a right to demand that they shall occupy their legitimate place in such administration. The Church of England has surely at least the same right to manage her own affairs that other religious bodies have ; and it is as necessary in her case as in any other, to her well being, that she should exercise that right. Unless, therefore, the Bishop is the Church, he ought not in justice to himself and others to be charged with sole legislative power. I accept the definition of the Church which is given by Bishop Hopkins (p. 6 of "*Plain Words*") and therefore I believe that all the constituent parts of the Church should have their proper share in the administration of affairs. Upon these principles, we desire the establishment of Diocesan assemblies ; and this desire is nearly unanimous. But it is sometimes asked whether the Church has not the *inherent right* of deliberating on her own affairs, and if so, what need exists for seeking legislative interference. No one can deny that right : but as in England the supremacy of the Sovereign is established, in matters ecclesiastical as well as civil, no Synod can act except by Royal license ; because the Church being, by the constitution of the country, incorporated, so to speak, with the State, the acts of a Synod are ratified by Parliament, and become the law of the land.

The Church in these Colonies being a part of the Church of England, the same impediments are conceived to stand in the way of the assembling of Synods : and all that we desire at the hands of the *Imperial* Parliament is relief from those impediments, which ought not to clog us, inasmuch as the Church in the Colonies stands virtually in no relation to the State different from that which other religious bodies bear. We desire to be placed, in this respect, on a footing of simple equality with other bodies. We also desire the interference of the *local* Legislature, only so far as to give a legal recognition to our Synods—to make their decisions binding upon all members of the Church.

So far, then, the matter seems to be sufficiently simple and clear. It has not, however, received as

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much consideration as it deserves, and consequently some lamentable misconceptions prevail upon some points connected with it. Most of us have grown up with ideas and associations regarding the Church which have reference to its condition as an *establishment*: and the necessity of adapting our views to the different relation which she bears to the Government of a Colony does not seem to press itself upon our attention as it ought to do. The Church was too long regarded as a mere creature of the state: and the fact that for many years the Government of England thought it no more than the duty of a Christian State to make some provision for the maintenance of Religion in the Colonies has tended, however unwarrantably, to foster this notion. Men forget that as they do not, as subjects of the Queen, stand in the same relation to Imperial Laws as their fellow countrymen in England, so neither is this their condition as Churchmen. If we need a separate Legislative power within the Colony in civil affairs, we need it in Ecclesiastical also. If, indeed, the whole system of the British constitution, of which the Church is an essential part, had been reproduced in the colonies, this necessity would not exist, or rather it would have been provided for. But now that the Church is left destitute of whatever advantages were derived to her from connection with the State, she must be permitted, in all reason and justice, to resume so much of her inherent right, as those advantages made it unnecessary for her to exercise.

The Imperial Parliament was requested to enact a measure which would relieve the Colonial Churches from the operation of the act 25 Henry VIII. That measure passed the House of Lords, but was rejected in the Commons. The objection which is sometimes raised to it as an interference with Colonial rights seems to be capable of being removed from the minds of all reasonable men by two considerations. 1st. That the Bill being simply *permissive*, no Colonial Diocese would have been *obliged* to act upon it: and 2ndly, that the real or supposed disabilities, which it was its object to remove, growing only

out of an *Imperial* statute, which never contemplated such a case as ours, *Imperial* Legislation was necessary to set us free from them. But objection is made also to the wording of the Bill, where permission is given to the Clergy and Laity of a Diocese to meet in Synod and enact rules and regulations, *with the assent of the Bishop*. One would think that it might be almost sufficient, to show the unreasonableness of this objection, to put the case of the bill reading thus, "It shall be lawful for the Clergy and Laity of a Diocese, assembled in Synod, to enact rules and regulations, **WITHOUT the assent of the Bishop**". (Such rules must be enacted either *with* or *without* his assent.) Suppose such an act had become law, on what principle, or with what shadow of consistency, could it have been received by men who call themselves **EPISCOPALIANS**? I will not now go over again the ground which has been so well taken in the "*Few plain words*": but I have put the matter in this point of view, because I think it is one which sets the inconsistency and absurdity of the view which is there combated in the strongest light. And yet this is no more than is demanded by those who object to this clause of the bill. They want, in plain English, to have the *Clergy and the Laity governing a Diocese, framing rules by which the Bishop himself must be bound, while they ignore the very existence of his office*. I can well conceive how a conscientious Episcopalian, under such a system as this, might feel himself constrained to disobey the enactments of such a Synod, even though they might have the sanction of the civil law. He would recognize his Bishop as his chief spiritual guide and ruler, under Christ: he would find his Bishop, (supported it might be by nearly one half of the Clergy—possibly more, making allowance for necessary absences, &c.—and nearly one half of the Lay representatives, and possibly a great majority of the lay people out of doors,) pointing out one course of action as the duty of the Church, and an accidental majority, on some particular occasion, of Clergy and Laity enjoining another. He believes his bishop to be, if any on earth are, among "the

implanted necessity made mission is necessary to regulations, in that unreality of the Clergy to enact *of the* *with* *act had shadow by men will not so well put the it is one the view ent.* And those who in plain *cerning a himself existence of* *cscientious might feel* *s of such nction of* *pp as his he would* *early one llowance e half of* *majority out one*, and an occasion, of believes long "the powers that be"—he believes, on the authority of inspiration, that "the powers that be are ordained of God: whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."—He is not a Presbyterian: and therefore does not believe that the Clergy and Laity without the Bishop (though he is willing to recognize their co-operating power, and to limit by it the power of the Bishop) can challenge his obedience as to the powers that are ordained of God, and in this perplexity he cannot choose but to obey God, in obeying His minister, rather than man. In the constitution of civil affairs, it may, or may not, be lawful for nations to change their form of government by common consent: two different forms of civil government cannot co-exist in the same country, and whatever form is established by common consent lays claim to the obedience of the whole community. But, the case is different in the Church; because it is in its very form of government that it is distinguished from other religious bodies: men cannot discard its principle of government without discarding with it their own distinctive character as *Episcopalians*. An Englishman under Cromwell was as much an Englishman as one that was the subject of Charles 1st—but to call a man an *Episcopalian* who refuses to acknowledge the legitimate authority of his Bishop, is simply absurd. Here is a plain case of Divine right, whatever men may think of *civil* authority. There are those among us, and they not the least conspicuous for charity, humility, and other Christian graces, who would prefer to be governed *solely* by their Bishop; and it is unjust to such as these, while the Bishop is willing to associate both Clergy and Laity with himself in the administration of affairs, that they should be *compelled* to yield obedience to a different authority, and one which they cannot recognize. There can be no injustice to any in submitting all to the action of laws which have received the concurrent assent of Bishop, Clergy, and Laity.

All this is so reasonable that we might hope it would meet with general acceptance. But, alas! there are

so many *unreasonable* men, so many inconsistent notions, in the world, that we must go even further.—To meet what is said by men professing to be *Episcopians*, we must needs prove the Apostolic origin of Episcopacy. I will not attempt to do that here. My object in writing is to enable you, by God's blessing, to put such men, when you may meet with them, upon thinking whether they do really see the lengths they are going,—that it is nothing short of repudiating the primitive Constitution of the Church;—whether they understand what they say, and whereof they affirm—whether they are not sometimes guilty of “foolish talking,” which is “not convenient,” that is, unbecoming a Christian: whether they remember that “for **EVERY IDLE WORD** that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment:” that “by their *words* they shall be justified, and by their *words* they shall be condemned.” Men run wild with a popular notion: they do not consider their responsibility before God: they forget that the aim of a Christian should be in whatsoever he does, whether in *word* or in deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and for the glory of God. They forget that to *despise dominion*, to be *presumptuous, self-willed*, and *not afraid to speak evil of dignities*, are characteristic of the enemies of the Cross of Christ—and that the adversary of souls has no surer way of obstructing the progress of Christian truth than by sowing strife among Christian men—and they suffer themselves, all unconsciously, to fall into his snare, and to act as his instruments. They forget that divisions are signs of a carnal mind, which is *enmity against God*. May God, in mercy, grant them the grace to see their fault and their danger,—may He give us all grace “to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:” “with one mind, to strive together for the faith of the Gospel,” and to “obey those that have the rule over us, and to submit ourselves” that the account which they shall render for us, may not be “unprofitable” for us.

But there is one other point of view in which we must regard this matter. It is sometimes found that well meaning, and in the main well affected, men are

afraid of the *possible consequences* of giving too much power into the hands of a Bishop. They are ready to profess their belief that under existing arrangements they should have no apprehensions : but they wish to guard against the possibility of danger. But this is altogether an incorrect way to put the case, as I think a little honest reflection will convince them. Because, first of all, *they cannot give the Bishop power : he can have no power at all, except it be given him from above* : and they will do well to pause, lest haply, in resisting the ordinance of God, they be found even to fight against God. And, secondly—they must learn to regard the *office*, and not the *person*, of a Bishop. It is too much the fashion of the present day to lose sight of the duty which we owe to the *office* of those who are over us in the Lord, and to attach ourselves to their *persons*—to regard them, not as the ambassadors of Christ, but in their private and individual capacities ; and I believe that many of the evils which oppress the Church may be traced to this source. Bishops, certainly, are but mortal men : we do not claim infallibility for them : *but if we believe the Episcopate to be an ordinance of God*, we must act accordingly, and leave the issue to God alone. *In a matter where principle is concerned, we have nothing whatever to do with consequences.* If it be our duty, as Episcopalian, to give the Bishop his due authority, it does not require any very great exercise of faith to believe that God will give His blessing to His own ordinance—that we may safely trust Him to make things work together for good to His Church, if we carry out his appointments. Surely it argues more of Christian faith to pray (as those that believe that whatsoever they ask in prayer they shall receive) that the “Church being always preserved from false Apostles may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors,” than to be running counter to the spirit of Apostolic institutions, in order to guard against the possible contingency of having “an unworthy Bishop.” If we were, all of us, “men of faith and men of prayer,” we should not need to fight these battles of Apostolical Order. If Evan-

gelical Truth really pervaded all our hearts, we should not be going about to devise human precautions against evils for which God has provided the cure.

I do not wish to depart from the principle which I have just now endeavored to lay down, or I might shew the groundlessness of such fears as I have spoken of, from the actual working of similar institutions. I am content, for my part, to take my stand upon the principle that, *as I believe Episcopacy to be an essential element in the Constitution of the Church, as it was ordered by the Apostles, acting under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, I cannot be a party (even if it were expedient) to handing over the government of the Church to Presbyters and Laymen.* And I pray God to give all our Bishops grace to stand firm in the defence of the rights of their office. For so only can we hope for lasting peace.

Believe me,

Your sincere friend and fellow-servant in Christ,

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